

Minutes of: **STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting: 18th September 2025

Present: Councillor N Bayley (in the Chair)
Councillors S Arif, A Booth, R Gold, M Hayes, J Hook, D Quinn,
M Rahimov and D Vernon

Also in attendance: Jacqui Dennis, Director of Law and Democratic Services.
Michael Cunliffe, Democratic Services.
Independent Persons: Craig Ainsworth and Stuart Birtwell

Public Attendance: No members of the public or press were present at the meeting.

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors K Hussain and T Rafiq.
Councillor S. Arif acted as a substitute representative for Councillor Hussain.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING & ANY MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the last meeting held on the 1st July 2025 were approved as a correct record.

4 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GUIDANCE

Jacqui Dennis reported that this item was included on the work programme for 2025-2026.
The draft version of the guidance was not ready for inclusion on the agenda with additions
required from the communications and policy departments.

It was agreed:

That the item be deferred for inclusion on a future meeting agenda.

5 CODE OF CONDUCT- ANNUAL REVIEW

The Monitoring Officer, Jacqui Dennis reported a revised code of conduct was previously
agreed by the Members of the Standards Committee and subsequently agreed by Council.
The Committee recommended that the code was annually reviewed by this Committee whilst
Members had also adopted a guide to the code.

Previously, the Standards Committee approved a revised Member code of conduct following a
recommendation from a subgroup of the Committee. Consideration was given to the Council's
existing Code of Conduct for Members following the publication of the Local Government
Ethical Standards report produced by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) and
the Local Government Association's (LGA) Model Code of Conduct (LGA's Model Code). At
that time, it was noted that the code had not been updated following the introduction of a
revised model code. Members considered the guidance in detail and a new code was agreed.

At a subsequent Standards meeting on the 3rd April 2024, Members agreed guidance to
accompany the code of conduct. The Guidance was brought forward by the Committee to

assist and aid members understanding of the code and to give examples of what behaviour may result in a breach of the code of conduct.

Training on the revised code was provided to all Members following the introduction of the new code. Training on the code is provided annually by the Monitoring Officer.

Members were asked to review the code and consider whether any revisions are needed to the code or guidance. Any changes to the code would need to be approved by Council. Therefore, Monitoring Officer would welcome Members view on whether there are particular areas of the code that should be the focus for the next Member training later this year.

A Member asked was there anything missing from the code or had anything cropped up over the last 12 months. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that bullying and harassment is a frequent complaint made but at times there is not enough evidence to proceed with an investigation. Social media issues had also seen a rise and work was required on Member safety guidance to combat any inappropriate behaviour by members of the public.

The Independent Member, Craig Ainsworth commented that Members can be unwittingly goaded by members of the public online resulting in a complaint being submitted and they should think carefully before instantly replying. This could be included in the training and that the tone of a reply via social media should be appropriate. He added that training was provided to individual political groups last year and those Councillors who did not attend should be informed to attend the session this year and group leaders informed. Any Member not trained for over 12 months should be flagged. The Monitoring Officer would liaise with group whips and Councillor Rahimov commented that the handbook advised Members must attend.

It was agreed:-

That Members would review the code of conduct (Appendix 1) and guidance to Members on the code of conduct (Appendix 2) and communicate to the Monitoring Officer any revisions to the code and guidance following the review.

6

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW LETTER 2024-25

The Monitoring Officer, Jacqui Dennis reported on the findings and recommendations of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for 2024-2025.

The Committee discussed the Annual Review Letter 2024-25 which was publicly available and highlighted:-

- For Bury 71% of complaints investigated were upheld compared to an average of 81% in similar authorities.
- 10 cases were investigated and upheld
- 4 cases were investigated and not upheld
- The number of complaints and enquiries received for 24/25 as compared to 23/24 had increased slightly.

In summary, between the 1st April 2024 to the 31st March 2025, the LGO dealt with 89 complaints. Of these, 38 were not for them or not ready for investigation. The LGO assessed and closed 37 complaints and investigated 14 complaints.

The LGO have advised on comparing statistics across the years and that they previously changed their investigation processes. This contributed towards an increase in the average

uphold rate across all complaints. Members should consider comparing individual Council uphold rates against the average rate rather than against previous years.

Complaints about education and children's services are still dominating the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's casework, but housing cases were now the second biggest area of concern for people complaining.

The LGO Annual Review of Local Government Complaints in England for 2024-2025 was attached to the agenda pack and pulled together the national picture of trends and common issues that have arisen from complaints over the last year.

The Monitoring Officer was pleased to report that the LGO had noted the Council's significant improvement in dealing with LGO cases.

A Member asked about a visual table of complaints and the Clerk to the meeting had circulated spreadsheets with the agenda packs to Members to detail the data for the year.

A Member enquired if there had been any follow up with raising performance concerns with individual authorities in July. No issues were reported to the Council after publication of the annual letter.

A Member who was also part of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked about financial impacts throughout the year in forms of compensation payments. The Clerk to the meeting would source and provide this information ready for the Scrutiny meeting taking place in the late Autumn period.

It was agreed:-

- (a) That the content of the Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter to the Council be noted; and:-
- (b) That the complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman referred to the Council during 2024/25 and their outcomes be noted.

7 URGENT BUSINESS

No urgent business was reported.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next Standards Committee meeting was scheduled to take place at 6.00pm on Wednesday the 26th November 2025 at Bury Town Hall.

COUNCILLOR N BAYLEY
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 5.30pm and ended at 6.15pm)